

Message Text

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SUBJECT: NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRIA

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1. SUMMARY. AUSTRIA'S HALTING STEPS TOWARD NUCLEAR POWER ARE BEING SLOWED STILL FURTHER. PRESENT ESTIMATE IS THAT FIRST NUCLEAR POWER PLANT WILL NOT BE FULLY COMPLETED AND APPROVED TO BEGIN OPERATIONS UNTIL LATE 1977. DECISION ON WHETHER TO GO AHEAD WITH SECOND AND FURTHER PLANTS NOW HAS BEEN PUT OFF UNTIL COMPLETION OF UPCOMING PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND A SUBSEQUENT PARLIAMENTARY DECISION ON THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR POWER IN AUSTRIA. FURTHER ACTION ON POSSIBLE NUCLEAR SAFETY STUDY VISIT TO US BY GOA AUTHORITIES ALSO WILL BE DELAYED AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER FIRST PHASE OF INFORMATION PROGRAM, WHICH ENDS NEXT SPRING. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFFS RECENTLY HELD LENGTHY DISCUSSION ON NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRIA WITH NUCLEAR ENERGY COORDINATOR IN FEDERAL CHANCELLERY RICHARD POLACZEK AND ENERGY POLICY SPECIALIST IN TRADE MINISTRY GUENTER

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OBERMAIR. AUSTRIANS INDICATED THAT EXCEPT FOR

COMPLETION OF FIRST NUCLEAR POWER PLANT AT ZWENTENDORF, FUTURE ROLE OF NUCLEAR POWER HERE WILL BE DETERMINED ONLY AFTER COMPLETION OF AN EXTENSIVE PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND SOME FORM OF A DECISION BY PARLIAMENT.

3. INFORMATION/DECISION PROCESS IS TO HAVE THREE DISTINCT PHASES: FIRST PHASE WILL BE SERIES OF TEN OPEN MEETINGS (3 IN VIENNA; 7 IN THE PROVINCES) BETWEEN OCTOBER 14 AND MARCH 24, 1977, WHICH WILL BE AIMED AT BUILDING OBJECTIVE, FACTUAL INFORMATION AS BASIS FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF NUCLEAR POWER ISSUES. TOPICS WILL INCLUDE, INTER ALIA, SOCIETAL, ECONOMIC, ENERGY POLICY, MEDICAL-BIOLOGICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND TECHNICAL SAFETY QUESTIONS, AND A DISCUSSION OF RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH NUCLEAR POWER. PANELISTS AND MODERATOR SELECTED FOR EACH SESSION ARE TO BE "OBJECTIVE", I.E., NOT CONNECTED WITH GROUPS FAVORING (POWER COMPANIES) OR OPPOSING NUCLEAR POWER. PANELISTS WILL BE LARGELY DRAWN FROM UNIVERSITIES AND WILL BE MOSTELY AUSTRIANS, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL GERMANS AND A BULGARIAN ARE TO BE INCLUDED. AN AMERICAN, PROFESSOR GEORGE WALD OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN INVITED BUT UNABLE TO ACCEPT. MODERATOR AND PANELISTS ARE TO MEET IN ADVANCE OF EACH SESSION TO TRY TO FOCUS AREAS WHERE THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT AND WHERE THERE IS NOT. AN INITIAL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT IS TO BE PREPARED FOLLOWING THIS INITIAL FACT-FINDING PHASE. BOTH GOA OFFICIALS WERE VERY CAUTIOUS IN COMMENTING ON ANTICIPATED PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN. THE EFFORT TO STIMULATE AN EFFECTIVE DEBATE SEEMS SINCERE, BUT PROSPECTS FOR PRODUCING MUCH PUBLIC RESPONSE APPEAR DOUBTFUL.

4. COMMENT: SINCE MANY EXPERTS ON THE TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED ARE ASSOCIATED IN SOME WAY WITH THE POWER INDUSTRY, THE "OBJECTIVITY" REQUIREMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST-ROUND DISCUSSIONS MAY WORK TO THE ADVANTAGE OF NUCLEAR POWER OPPONENTS. ALTHOUGH EXCLUDED FROM THE OFFICIAL PART OF PHASE ONE OF THE INFORMATION PROGRAM, THOSE FAVORING NUCLEAR POWER HAVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BEEN ACTIVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE IN COMING MONTHS. ON SEPTEMBER 7, DR. CHAUNCEY STARR, PRESIDENT OF THE ELECTRIC POWER RESEARCH INSTITUTE (PALO ALTO, CALIF.) GAVE A LECTURE TO A SELECT AUDIENCE AT THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED SYSTEMS ANALYSIS (LAXENBURG) ON THE GROWING ROLE NUCLEAR POWER WILL HAVE TO PLAY IN THE US IN COMING YEARS IF WE ARE TO MAINTAIN ECONOMIC GROWTH. IN A SIMILAR VEIN, DR. WILHELM

ERBACHER, HEAD OF THE AUSTRIAN FEDERAL ELECTRIC POWER HOLDING COMPANY, RECENTLY TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT AUSTRIA WILL FACE A POSSIBLE POWER SHORTAGE IF THE FIRST NUCLEAR POWER PLANT DOES NOT COME ON STREAM IN 1977 AND THAT IN THE MEANTIME AUSTRIAN ELECTRIC POWER NEEDS CAN ONLY BE MET BY ADDITIONAL COSTLY ENERGY IMPORTS. FINALLY, RENOWNED US NUCLEAR PHYSICIST DR. EDWARD TELLER WILL BE IN VIENNA OCTOBER 14-20 UNDER THE USIS VOLUNTARY SPEAKERS PROGRAM AND WILL GIVE SEVERAL LECTURES ON NUCLEAR POWER. END COMMENT.

5. SECOND PHASE OF INFORMATION PROGRAM, TO START NEXT SPRING, WILL BE A SERIES OF DEBATES ON NUCLEAR POWER BETWEEN PROPONENTS AND OPPONENTS. FOLLOWING THESE DEBATES, A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT IS TO BE FORWARDED TO PARLIAMENT. THIRD PHASE IS TO BE A DECISION BY PARLIAMENT (IN AN UNSPECIFIED FORM) ON THE FUTURE ROLE OF NUCLEAR POWER IN AUSTRIA. OBERMAIR OPINED THAT PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION PARTIES MAY OBJECT TO HAVING THE BURDEN ON NUCLEAR POWER PASSED TO THE LEGISLATURE AND THAT THEY MAY TRY TO FORCE THE KREISKY ADMINISTRATION TO COMMIT ITSELF ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ON THIS SENSITIVE ISSUE.

6. BECAUSE RECENT PRESS REPORTS ALSO LEFT STATUS OF ZWENTENDORF PLANT SOMEWHAT CONFUSED, EMBOFFS SOUGHT CLARIFICATION OF PLANS AND TIMING. GOA OFFICIALS ASSURED US THAT PLANT WOULD BE PUT ON STREAM, BUT THAT SCHEDULE HAD BEEN DELAYED IN ORDER TO MAKE TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENTS DEEMED NECESSARY TO CORRECT PROBLEMS THAT HAD DEVELOPED IN CONTRACTOR'S EARLIER GERMAN PLANTS. LATE 1977 IS NOW TARGET FOR COMMENCING OPERATIONS.

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7. EMBOFFS, NOTING THAT GOA'S RECENTLY REVISED MEDIUM-TERM ENERGY PLAN STILL CALLED FOR AT LEAST TWO AND POSSIBLY THREE OPERATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS BY 1985, ASKED ABOUT STATUS OF SECOND NUCLEAR POWER PROJECT. GOA OFFICIALS RESPONDED THAT GO-AHEAD ON SECOND NUCLEAR POWER PLANT DEFINITELY DEPENDED ON OUTCOME OF INFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND SOME NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT APPROVAL. THUS, EVEN IF A DECISION IS MADE TO GO AHEAD, THEY DID NOT EXPECT A NEW TENDER OFFER TO GO OUT BEFORE LATE 1977 AT THE EARLIEST.

8. EMBOFFS ALSO BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF LONG-PENDING NUCLEAR SAFETY STUDY VISIT BY AUSTRIAN OFFICIALS TO US. POLACZEK SAID PROPOSED VISIT WOULD HAVE TO BE PUT OFF AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER FIRST PHASE OF

INFORMATION PROGRAM. HE ADDED THAT AS RESULT OF INSPECTION TRIP HERE BY ERDA PHYSICAL SECURITY EXPERTS LAST APRIL, AUSTRIANS WERE NOW THINKING IN TERMS OF A VISIT COVERING BOTH REACTOR SAFETY AND PHYSICAL SECURITY QUESTIONS. (SEE REF B FOR FOLLOW-UP ON ERDA TEAM VISIT.)

9. COMMENT: PUBLICITY GIVEN TO RECENT NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS IN US AND GERMANY, CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR POWER, AND ESPECIALLY UNANSWERED PROBLEMS CONCERNING NUCLEAR WASTE DISPOSAL ALL ARE FACTORS IN FURTHER SLOWDOWN IN AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR POWER. FALLOUT FROM RECENT ELECTION DEFEAT OF SWEDISH SOCIALISTS ALSO HEIGHTENS SENSITIVITY OF AUSTRIAN SOCIALISTS TO NUCLEAR POWER CONTROVERSY ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT HERE DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS ISSUE WAS PRINCIPAL REASON FOR PALME'S DEFEAT. BUCHANAN

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